

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW**  
**Vice President Public Policy, Advocacy and Organizing**  
**Planned Parenthood of Southern New England**

**In support of raised Senate Bill 957 *An Act Concerning the Oversight of Health Care in Correctional Institutions by the Department of Public Health***  
**February 22, 2023**

Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy Vahey, and honorable members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Vice President Public Policy, Advocacy and Organizing at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of raised Senate Bill 957 *An Act Concerning the Oversight of Health Care in Correctional Institutions by the Department of Public Health*. As the state's largest provider of sexual and reproductive health care, including abortion, to over 50,000 patients at 14 health centers across the state, Planned Parenthood believes all people should have access to quality, affordable health care as a basic human right — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income or if you have health insurance.

Connecticut is currently the only state where the Department of Corrections (DOC) oversees and operates its own healthcare system. Last year the Public Health Committee sought to set forth actions to address these issues with S.B. 448 ([PA 22-133](#)). As a member of the Regulate DOC Healthcare CT Coalition our request is that the Public Health Committee steps forward as courageously as it did last year and implement regulation and oversight of the Department of Correction's healthcare system.

Despite having the constitutional right to health care, quality of care for incarcerated individuals in the State of Connecticut has been subpar, and current challenges in the DOC healthcare system are contributing to poor health outcomes for incarcerated individuals, returning citizens and economic burdens on their families.

The majority of incarcerated women are parents and are of reproductive age, which has important implications for their reproductive health care needs.<sup>i</sup> Research has found that incarcerated individuals have high rates of prior unintended pregnancy, low prevalence of contraception use, are often sexually active immediately before incarceration and after release, and that many would like to initiate a contraceptive method while in custody in preparation for release.<sup>ii</sup>

Access to quality sexual and reproductive health care should be a guaranteed right for everyone including those whose bodily autonomy is limited due to incarceration and who are under DOC control. There is a long history of reproductive control and coercion exerted by the criminal legal system including forced sterilization without consent. This is an urgent matter of reproductive justice and racial justice, as the number of incarcerated women, particularly women of color, continues to increase across the country.<sup>iii</sup> It is critical that the state's correctional facilities implement strong policies, including S.B. 957, to meet all sexual and reproductive health care including gender affirming care needs of people who are incarcerated to prevent further negligence and harm.

Senate Bill 957 moves the needle forward to providing improved healthcare for incarcerated individuals, but the bill could be strengthened with the inclusion of the following:

- Establish a regulating body and oversight process for the Department of Corrections healthcare system through the Department of Public Health in combination with the standards and accreditation provided by the National Commission on Correctional Healthcare.<sup>iv</sup>
- Creation of a Correctional Health Review Board that would receive reports on health outcomes for incarcerated individuals and returning citizens, healthcare staffing reports, health related incident reports, and provide policy and procedure recommendations.
- The Correctional Health Review Board membership must be composed of healthcare experts and community stakeholders, including but not limited to; OBGYNs, infectious disease specialists, endocrinologists, dentists, mental health and substance abuse practitioners, as well as returning citizens and justice-impacted people.

Planned Parenthood strongly supports measures that improve access to quality health care for all people, and this must include people incarcerated in Connecticut's prisons. Legal rights to reproductive health care are meaningless without access and if someone does not have the ability to secure these rights while incarcerated and their bodily autonomy is controlled by the state. We urge you to support raised S.B. 957 and consider these additional recommendations by the coalition to improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals, DOC healthcare workers, and returning residents. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>i</sup> Reproductive Health Care for Incarcerated Pregnant, Postpartum, and Nonpregnant Individuals [https://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Fulltext/2021/07000/Reproductive\\_Health\\_Care\\_for\\_Incarcerated.37.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Fulltext/2021/07000/Reproductive_Health_Care_for_Incarcerated.37.aspx)

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/11/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> National Commission on Correctional Healthcare [https://www.ncchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021\\_AR\\_Brochure\\_FNL\\_web.pdf](https://www.ncchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021_AR_Brochure_FNL_web.pdf)